

Serve Montana Symposium
Focus Areas and Panel of Experts Session: Healthy Futures
February 11, 2010

Facilitator: Vicki Turner

Panelists:

- Jackie Forba, MT DPHHS Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP)
- Charlie Rehbein, MT DPHHS Senior & Long-Term Care Division
- Melanie Reynolds, Lewis & Clark City-County Public Health

Panelists were asked to answer three questions:

1. What programs/services does your organization provide?
2. What is going on in regard to your programs/services that we as community builders need to know?
3. What gaps exist from your perspective and how might national service members and volunteers help address these gaps?

Melanie Reynolds: She described local health departments and that there is one in each county of the state. In some counties the health department is only a one person operation and others have up to 300 staff members. Health departments detect diseases such as H1N1. They create conditions to be healthy by providing education and information on a variety of topics such as obesity, tobacco, chronic disease, and child/adult immunizations; inspect restaurants and protect water and air quality; and provide Healthy Starts youth screenings and some cancer screenings. Lewis & Clark County is a Superfund site where they received funds to be able to do childhood lead screenings. Health Departments also are a good resource for assessment information. They track information and put together a County Health Profile. When they look at programs and services they use three questions:

- What works?
- Can we prove it?
- What is the return on our investment?

As far as what can be done, Melanie recommended that everyone go back to their communities and connect with your health department. Check on resources and programs you can utilize. Health Departments always need volunteers, whether it is to participate on committee work or help with an immunization clinic. Utilize their annual County Health Profile tracking information for your assessment work.

Charlie Rehbein: Aging Services statewide are currently serving approximately 58,000 of the 158,000 seniors that are eligible through the Area Agencies on Aging. These services include senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, legal assistance, Nursing Home Ombudsmen, transportation, nutrition screening, exercise, and the Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP). Montana is projected to have the 5th highest percent of elderly by 2025. In 2000 we were 14th. The fastest growing age group are those 100 years of age and older. In 2011 the first Baby Boomers turn 65. In Montana several communities (mostly in Eastern Montana) are getting older faster than the average with up to 30% seniors. Many need to travel 50 to 120 miles or more

one way for medical care. There is no north-to-south public transportation in the state and very limited east-to-west. In July they will be working on the 4-Year State Plan for aging and community members need to participate in the planning process. The rural and frontier communities are going to need help to be able to maintain services. Most of the services provided are reliant on volunteers.

Jackie Forba: Montana has the highest number of self-employed individuals. For those that can afford it, many pay an average of \$1,000/month for family health insurance and that is with the highest deductible possible. Employers cannot afford to pay employee insurance benefits. The Healthy Montana Kids plan is very exciting for kids who have been uninsured or underinsured. The people of Montana came together to fight for expansion of CHIP and Medicaid. Legislature passed it and funded it. Now up to 100,000 kids can be covered under the Healthy Montana Kids Plan, which includes both CHIP and Medicaid. Which program they are eligible for depends on the financial situation. Jackie stressed the need to educate the public to get all kids insured. Right now they have 5 AmeriCorps VISTA members developing the expansion effort, which has helped them reach a total of 73,000 kids who are now enrolled. This is an increase of 40,000 just since September. The ultimate goal is healthy kids.

The need for networking is very important. The completion of the 2010 Census by everyone in Montana is critical for funding for services such as WIC, Children's health and Mental Health services. Help families access and complete Healthy Montana Kids Plan applications. Speak up and share information in your professional and individual circles.

Small Group Discussions - Participants broke up into two groups to discuss the following:

1. What are you currently doing, or could you do, to address the needs identified by the panel?
2. What stands out as some of the most significant points covered?
3. How might your work be impacted by what you heard?

Group #1 - Healthy futures for youth:

Things that could be done include: prevention, access to health care/mental health care, continue to develop more resources (funding), access to information (Healthy MT Kids), quality assurance, wraparound services, integration of services, services tailored to needs of youth – reactive attachment, PTSD, etc.. Partnerships such as coalitions are a well-rounded approach for funding, etc. The most significant point covered was the necessity of networking and coordination of services. The impact in what we have heard and discussed in this session is that partnerships have been formed and some meetings are already scheduled, we will continue to collaborate on community projects, and an important resource is seniors in the communities.

Group #2 - Healthy futures for seniors:

Currently Adult Protective Services staff to carry an average caseload of 171 adults. There is a need for guardianship for 225 individuals. Ravalli and Missoula County have the highest need. Transportation issues in rural communities and particularly Miles City

were discussed. A transportation program has started through RSVP and the Council on Aging utilizing volunteers and their own vehicles to transport seniors to medical appointments in Billings. The service is being discontinued because of lack of funds. The issue of aging communities was discussed, with the greatest problem being that seniors often times have to move to a larger community to be closer to accessible medical care. There is a dire need for economic development, particularly in Eastern Montana to be able to obtain and sustain the needed care within their communities.

The final observation – youth and seniors need to collaborate and work together on critical needs within the communities. Youth have the eyes, ears, and energy. Seniors have the wisdom and experience. Together they can conquer many issues!!!